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ABSTRACT

Future expansion in the field of early childhood education is seen to lie in a reorientation of research and development. This reorientation is that of conducting more research "on" practice. Answers to be sought by research "on" practice in Head Start curriculum models relate to what factors (variables) exist that either inhibit or facilitate the implementation of each model. Four broad classes of variables are: model variables, modeler variables, teacher and staff variables, and general on-site variables. Brief examples of each variable potentially affecting implementability of curriculum models are outlined. In addition to research "on" practice, it is also felt that there should be a modification of the focus of the research and development efforts concerning teachers and teaching. Included in these efforts should be causes of teacher behavior. Causes related to role relationships--teacher behavior determined by children, parents, other school personnel--and causes related to the larger social context should be examined. It is hoped that a sociology of early childhood education will be developed. References are provided. (DB)

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WHERE IS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GOING?

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Answers to the question posed in the title can be generated by asking others. One way is to ask where we are going if we continue to do what we are now doing. Another way is to ask where we want early childhood education to go. And related to this is the question of where we hope it is not going. Or, with crystal ball in hand we might try the title question itself: Where is early childhood education going? It is difficult to separate these lines of questioning; what we wish to achieve is certainly related to what we wish to avoid; and where we are going is to some extent related to what we are now doing.

In this concluding article I shall try each of these ways of approaching the question. My answers are speculations based on selective judgments as to what issues are important; the judgments are based in turn on several years of cross-country travel in early childhood programs and on my observations from the unique vantage point of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education.

Looking Into the Future

In matters of prophecy, it should be noted that painting scenarios of the future, although a fashionable exercise these days, is generally not very useful. Imagine what might have been said if we had asked someone in 1900 to paint a picture of what transportation would be like in 1950. He would very likely have predicted that every household would possess two specially bred horses, that road sweepers would be in short supply and that

what was good for the blacksmith's union would be good for the country!

This illustrates the proposition that at any future point in time, events will be determined and affected by forces and facts unknowable today. A related proposition is that the more dynamic the field of endeavor, the larger the number of unknowables.

Interesting hindsights can be obtained by comparing the Yearbooks of the National Society for the Study of Education of 1947 and of 1972, both on early childhood education. Although the two volumes differ in length by only ten pages, the 1947 Yearbook gives only one paragraph to what are called in the 1972 edition the "mass media." On page 30 is a single paragraph entitled "Radio, Movies and Comics" (Levinger and Murphy, 1947). The terms "movies" and "comics" do not even appear in the index of the 1972 Yearbook, but it has 23 cross-indexed entries related to the "mass media", e.g., aggression, media presentation of; morality, media presentation of stereotypes relating to; "Sesame Street;" etc., and there is an entire chapter on the effect of mass media on development.

A closer look at Levinger and Murphy's paragraph on radio, movies and comics is worthwhile. They report that research on the effects of those media on older children has shown larger vocabularies, stimulation to dilinquent behavior, and that they "derive important release from emotional conflicts" (p. 30, 1947). No references are given. They also caution readers that "In a few instances where children rely on ready-made stimulation to the exclusion of play or constructive exercises, they may postpone an effort to cope with reality." There was little or no inkling in 1947 that television would, within twenty-five years, become a fixed parameter in all children's environments.

In the 1947 Yearbook Anderson entitled the final paragraph of his chapter on theory of early childhood education "The Future." It speaks for itself:

> ...On the whole, despite obvious deficiencies at some points, the program of early childhood education is better now than it was in 1925, in 1930, or in 1935. More is known about children and their needs. Educational thinking at all levels has been modified by the concern with young children, by the stimulating research done, and by the convincing demonstrations of what good schools can do. This dynamic process conditions the future. Out of the strength, insight, and enthusiasm of the present program will come a future in which the needs of young children will be more adequately met (p. 100).

Was he far-seeing? In the 1972 Yearbook, Milton Akers expresses some optimism for the future, but clouds it with some disturbing cautions. I shall abstain from prophecy altogether! I prefer to take up some questions concerning where I hope we are going.

Restatement of the Problem

In looking back to the early sixties when plans were being developed for Head Start and other early childhood programs, we can see that our early statements of the problems to be solved by early childhood education were naive and oversimplified. It was clear to us that the early childhood years were the most formative and malleable ones in children's development. We were persuaded that those early years should be full of stimulation and enrichment. It seemed obvious that the children of poverty were understimulated--and analogy from orphanage studies. It followed that the lack of stimulation we attributed to the environments of the poor caused their children to be unresponsive to schooling, to start school at a

disadvantage. What they needed, we thought, was enrichment; a summer or a year of stimulating enrichment which would give them a head start on schooling.

In the luxury of retrospect, what do we know now that we did not know then? A full treatment of the answers to this question is beyond the scope of this paper. One of the answers I would like to discuss concerns the lack of stimulation we attributed to the environment of poor children.

It seems to me very rarely the case that children who are poor are understimulated. Indeed many children who are poor are overstimulated. They do not lack first-hand concrete experiences. Poor children very often live in rich environments -- rich in social, linguistic and cultural experiences -- as rich in meaning and complexity as the environments of children who are in a better socioeconomic position. What they do seem to lack is sufficient adult help in making sense out of their rich environments. It is in this sense that poor children, although it occurs among the wealthy too, seem to "starve in the midst of plenty" and thus appear to be understimulated. This restatement of the problem is strongly suggested by the research on mother-child interaction reported in recent years (See for example Hess (1969); Bee (1969); Levenstein (1970).

We also assumed that children of the poor were incapable of conceptual thought. We proliferated concept lessons by the hundreds. We erroneously attributed more intellectual value to public concepts than to private or idiosyncratic concepts. From a cognitive point of view there is no reason why the concept "food" involves any higher level of abstration or conceptual

power than the concept "the TV shows I like". The former is a concept shared among all speakers of the language; the latter is unique to the conceptualizer. With few exceptions, the goals of our proliferating curriculum models have emphasized the input of public concepts thought to be necessary for school success.

In restating the problem to be solved by early childhood education we can now emphasize the importance of helping children to make sense out of their own rich environments. We can now see that their environments are not so much deficient as they are different from those for whom conventional school practices were designed. This position suggests a role for the teacher as one of alerting children to the important and interesting events and phenomena in their own lives. It suggests that teachers treat children's own private concepts as valid while they help them to acquire those concepts that are shared by the wider community.

Reorientation of Research and Development

These recent years of expansion in early childhood education have been marked by impressive expenditures on basic research and curriculum development. (Miller, 1972; Stearns, 1971) The basic aim has been to translate theory into practice, a traditional approach to curriculum development. The reorientation I would like to propose is that of conducting more research on paractice. That is to say, rather than just asking how research on child development can be translated into curriculum models we might ask: What are the factors which either inhibit or facilitate the implementation of our ideas, knowledge and curriculum models? (See Gross, N., Giaquinta, J. B.; Bernstein, M., 1971)

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Examples of this effort can be drawn from the research and development efforts in the Office of Child Development's Planned Variation Experiment for Head Start, the Office of Education's Project Follow Through, and other projects like the DARCEE or Montessori programs.

If we take Head Start curriculum models as examples, the research on practice I am proposing would seek to answer the question: What are the factors (variables) which either inhibit or facilitate the implementation of each model? Without much difficulty we can propose at least four broad classes of variables: (1) model variables, (2) modeler variables, (3) teacher and staff variables, (4) general on-site variables. Brief examples of each variable potentially affecting implementability of curriculum models are outlined below.

1. Curriculum Model Variables

a. Clarity of model specifications.

Some models specify the nature and sequence of events that are to occur during implementation; some specify only styles of interacting with children independent of specific events.

b. Complexity of model specifications.

Some models specify complex interactions among characteristics of children, parents, materials, lessons, etc.; others specify standardized procedures for all children and parents.

c. Vulnerability of model to physical plant adequacy.

Some models require separate rooms for small group instruction and would be inhibited in a "social hall;" others would be facilitated by such a large open space.

d. Clarity and complexity of teacher role, teacher style, and teacher skill requirements of the model.

Some models specify direct-instructional roles for teachers, others require complex diagnostic skills, etc.

e. Inclusiveness of Models.

Some models subsume the entire school day, others specify procedures for small segments of daily sessions.

f. Parent participation.

Some models can be easily learned by parents so that their participation in classroom instruction is facilitated; others mystify parents and inhibit their involvement.

2. Modeler Variables

Each curriculum model was developed and sponsored by a modeler, and was supported on location by a field representative (FR) of the sponsoring modeler. Some examples of modeler variables are:

a. Intensity and adequacy of preservice, inservice and on-site training offered by modelers.

b. Intensity of moral support given on-site; charisma of modeler and FR; intensity of commitment or dedication to local staff and Head Start community.

c. Knowledge, skill and resourcefulness of FR.

d. Extensiveness of FR's experience with early childhood programs and young children.

e. Clarity of FR's role, responsibility and delimitations concerning local Head Start centers.

3. Teacher and Other Staff Variables

   a. Teachers' attitudes and commitment to the model's central concepts, goals and techniques.

   b. Teacher intelligence, skill, prior training and experience.

   c. Teacher personality.

   d. Roles of classroom assistants, aides and variables associated with them.

   e. Smoothness or friction among teaching staff.

4. General On-site Variables

   a. Adequacy of Head Start program before the adoption of the model.

   b. Adequacy of physical facilities, materials and equipment.

   c. Accessibility of materials and equipment (including Ditto machines) and other resources.

   d. Receptivity to and knowledge of model in local community.

   e. Receptivity of public school system personnel to model.

   f. Administrative smoothness versus friction.

   g. Relationships between local preschool program and citizen's advisories, and funding agency, licensing authorities, etc.

   h. Suitability and adaptibility of model to local culture and customs.

   i. Local political climate; race relations, school politics, etc.

   j. Adequacy of communication and coordination between preschool and public school personnel.

Experience shows that different models are vulnerable in different ways. Some are more sturdy than others in the face of low staff morale. Some are more vulnerable than others to the poor physical facilities commonly available to day care and Head Start Centers. Some are more resilient than

others in the face of the interstaff friction found in community action programs. Some models are greatly facilitated by the personal dedication of the modeler.

The exact nature of the variables affecting implementability of a curriculum model often cannot be known in advance of the experiment or project. Our knowledge and understanding of such factors could be greatly strengthened if we had "in-house" historians at project sites. Hopefully the training and inclusion on in-house historians in educational research efforts will be a development of the near future.

The research on practice suggested here would increase our understanding of the nature of the gap between our knowledge and performance, between our research and our actions.

Refocus on the Problems of Teachers

Along lines suggested in the preceding section, I would hope that the future brings a modification of the focus of our research and development efforts concerning teachers and teaching.

In the last decade it has become fashionable to discredit conventional teacher training. Responses to widespread dissatisfaction with teacher education have included some innovative approaches like microteaching and the use of advisors, some emphasis on re-education of teachers, and the more recent panacea, performance or competency-based certification approaches. In the next few years we should be instructed by the experiences provided by these efforts.

I hope that in the near future, we will add to our current interests

some concern for the causes of teacher behavior. My hunch is that even when preservice training programs meet our criteria, they still constitute only a minor cause of the behavior of a teacher once he is employed in the classroom. Before we speculate on the reasons leading to this "minor cause" hypothesis, I shall present a brief outline of immediate causes.

Causes Related to Role Relationships

One way to examine what causes teachers to do the things they do is to look at their role relationships, using Merton's (1968) concept of role set. Some examples follow.

Children as causes of teaching behavior. We are accustomed to studying the effects of teachers on children. But the literature of developmental psychology is rich with implications of the effects of children on teachers. We quickly recognize that shy or clinging children affect teachers in certain ways. We often overlook the impact of information about children on teachers' behavior. For example, a teacher might experience a given child as unattractive or difficult. Is she likely to change her response to him when she learns that his father is a Nobel prize winner? Are the responses different if the child is a girl? We should be studying children as "reinforcers" of teachers! There are many characteristics of children which are potential determinants of teacher behavior.

Assistant teachers, aides and volunteers as causes of teacher behavior. Sometimes teachers want to look good in the eyes of the other adults in their classrooms. Picture for example a white head teacher with a black assistant teacher working in a program where many of the children are black. The

white teacher, fearful of appearing to be down on a black child in the eyes of her black assistant teacher might refrain from responding to the child. How might her assistants interpret this? Another example of such causes of behavior is the not uncommon competition between teaching staffs for children's affection. Sometimes teachers unknowingly compete to establish which one of them a shy or fearful child prefers to cling to, or which one is liked best by the children. Such unconscious competitiveness blocks teachers' attention to solving children's problems. Other examples would include the effects of divergent philosophies about program structure, setting limits, and so forth.

Parents as causes of behavior. An example of teacher behavior determined by respect for parents' wishes is keeping children from getting paint on clothes or sand on themselves. Another is respecting a mothers' wish to keep her son from playing with dolls. Sometimes teachers who are aware of the tragic and distressful lives of certain parents respond to their children with pity rather than empathy, and fail to help the children to solve their developmental problems. In day care centers and nursery schools where parents pay for service there are many touchy issues. In such programs teachers often do things they would prefer not to, in order to make a good impression on parents.

Administrators as causes of teacher behavior. Usually administrators are more conscious of such things as health regulations, state codes and insurance regulations, and are likely to cause teachers to modify their programs and behavior accordingly. Good administrators facilitate and encourage desirable behavior. Some bend over backwards in the cause of supporting teachers' growth.

Janitor, bus drivers, and cooks. Sometimes the demands of janitors cause teachers to minimize certain activities. Sometimes teachers must terminate or forego potentially interesting projects, or keep children for long waiting periods to allow for bus drivers' needs. I know a preschool center in which the day's activities are always planned around the time schedule of the cooking staff. I might add here that there are programs in which psychologists, social workers, parent coordinators are perceived by teachers as potential saboteurs or spies whose opinions cause teachers to modify their behavior.

Causes of Teacher Behavior on the Social Context

There are many obvious ways in which forces in the larger social context impinge on the lives of teachers. Obviously school board regulations, availability of substitutes, terms of contracts, absence of contracts, insurance regulations, etc., are among the many determinants. Consider also that in the preschool, unlike elementary school, teachers are always visible or observable by other adults -- they cannot close the door and be alone with the children. How this visibility (See R. K. Merton, 1968, passim) affects preschool teachers has not been studied. Another example of the influence on teacher behavior of the larger social context can be seen in the effects of "bandwagons" or fads. If the bandwagon calls for teacher behavior which teachers do not yet have in their repertoires, or which are incompatible with their own preferences, the effects can be deleterious.

I hope that this brief outline of potential causes of teacher behavior is sufficient to support the hypothesis that, no matter how sufficient preservice training seems to be, it constitutes only a minor cause of teachers' behavior (See also Thelen, 1971). Certainly the effects of mediating variables should be examined. It would be interesting to study the internal vs external locus of control of reinforcement variables as defined by Lefcourt (1966) as a teacher attribute. The impacts of charismatic training institutions and leaders requires examination.

Conclusions

The issues raised in the sections above suggest that our customary emphases and investments in curriculum development and learning research should be seen in the perspective of the complex problems involved in professional practice. One of my hopes for the future is that we will develop a sociology of early childhood education, i.e., a thoughtful study of the larger context in which early childhood educators work.

Finally it seems to me that the really important decisions which have to be made by educators of young children cannot be made on the basis of our research findings. Research can help us to clarify issues, to identify some causal relationships and increase our insight and perspective on the complexities at hand. But the fundamental decisions are moral and philosophical ones. There are experts on language and reading and child development, but there are no experts on moral and philosophical decision-making. In this respect, as in many others, we are all equals. I hope we are equal to the complex tasks ahead.

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